

Wednesday 17 January 2024

St Antony of Egypt



Antony was born in about 251 AD.

His biographer says he heard the gospel message, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' He was twenty years of age. He was also very rich following the death of his parents. He did as the gospel instructed and went to live in the desert, living an austere life of manual work, charity, and prayer. His many spiritual struggles left him both wise and sensible and he became a spiritual guide for many who flocked to him. His simple rule of personal discipline and prayer was taken up and soon spread throughout Christendom.

Antony died peacefully in the desert in 356 AD, asking that he be buried secretly so that his person might be hidden in death as in life.

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The liturgy assumes this service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

To hear the hymns hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 All my hope on God is founded ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world and knows our every word and deed. Let us then open ourselves to the Lord and confess our sins in penitence and faith. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name. Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

All Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world:
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father:
receive our prayer.

**For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.**

The Collect for Antony of Egypt

Most gracious God,
who called your servant Antony to sell all that he had
and to serve you in the solitude of the desert:
by his example may we learn to deny ourselves
and to love you before all things;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the First Book of Kings

The word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.' So he went and did according to the word of the Lord; he went and lived by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi. *1 Kings 17:2-6*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. *Philippians 3:7-14*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 One thing I ask

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Someone came to Jesus and said, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these; what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.' When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, 'Then who can be saved?' But Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.'

Matthew 19:16–26

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Context is everything if we are to understand Antony properly. In fact, we know little that is reliable about his life before he felt the call of God, but we do know a great deal about his social context.

Christianity had entered the country almost immediately following the day of Pentecost the Egyptian form of faith known as 'Coptic' can reasonably claim to be the world's oldest Christian church. Modern Coptic worship will differ greatly from this ancient expression, for several reasons. But in third-century Egypt, the Roman Empire was a dominant occupying force and had been for centuries. Its authority and power controlled everything.

Sometimes the Roman Empire tolerated Christianity but at other times it persecuted the new faith without mercy because it was seen as subversive and therefore a threat to imperial power. It had to be destroyed and, as potentially treasonous, had to be destroyed in a very public way. We know from Imperial records that the intense persecution under Emperor Valerian (who reigned 253–260) more-or-less stopped after he won the Battle of Edessa in 260, and that persecution stopped entirely under his successor Gallienus (253–268). But no fewer than ten emperors reigned during the following fifteen years (!) implying severe instability. It's no wonder that when Diocletian came to the Imperial throne in 283, he refused to tolerate any opposition. He therefore resumed the persecutions of Christians with an almost insane savagery. He died in 305.

Antony's family would have remembered these persecutions although Antony himself possibly would not. But he would have seen the see-sawing of political chaos and feared for the future. Into this extreme chaos, the obvious questions include, 'What is *my* future and can *I* prepare for it?' then, 'What if I'm killed for my faith and will it prepare me for a violent death?' which surely prompts the next, 'If/when I am killed, will it have been worthwhile insofar as, *will I enter Heaven?*'

In people of faith, times of religious persecution often suggest lines of questioning like these, so it's likely this was Antony's frame of mind when, as a twenty-year old, he heard a visiting preacher proclaiming the Gospel passage set for today and felt Jesus speaking directly to him. For safety, the preacher may have been speaking to a private meeting; we do not know. But we do know its impact for Antony gave away his considerable riches and fled into the desert 'to save his soul'. He had wealth and he wanted Heaven; and, in his own mind, he realised the two were not compatible. He chose eternal life rather than riches. In context, he was also wanting to avoid a horrific death.

It's interesting that he fled to the Egyptian desert to ensure and explore his faith. Deserts are places of complete anonymity in which to hide. Like Jesus in the wilderness, he deliberately removed everything separating his own soul from God so, while there, Antony was no longer encumbered by possessions and its austerity would have stripped away all plenty or luxury, and all beauty. He lived alone as a hermit. As a bridge between his past and present lives, all this time he was re-living the hammer-blow after hammer-blow he'd heard from a preacher before he fled for the desert, re-hearing in his mind the phrase, '*If you would be perfect ... enter the Kingdom of God.*' It must have felt very potent.

Antony's 'biography' should be read with caution because it is not history in any modern sense. But it's clear he later attracted a series of 'disciples' who, in context, may themselves have been fleeing the persecutions of Domitian. They would have been traumatised and, in consequence, responded positively to an expression of faith shaped by similar fears and hopes. They would also have experienced real Christian love for, if Anthony's faith was genuine, the love of God would certainly have flowed through him and, in turn, these disciples clearly loved him like a father.

It was inevitable that Antony's life changed after decades of solitude when these disciples arrived. As the number of disciples grew, Antony composed a simple rule of life. In part it was intended to stop abuse and preserve the form of life he had come to love; he did not want continual disruptions to interrupt his prayer life and separate him from God. He therefore drew up a series of simple rule, adapting his own self-imposed ideas of discipline and prayer. He wanted to preserve his own insights and share the joys he knew. The rule clearly succeeded insofar as he died at an extreme age—legend suggests he was 104 years of age. He was revered, and his legacy spread throughout Christendom and lives on today. Most monastic communities embrace elements of his rule.

Our faith as Christians may not be precarious because of persecution from a Roman Emperor, but it is always unstable and at risk. Maybe we feel persecuted;

maybe we are simply distracted too easily; maybe we undermine our commitment with good works. What, then, is Antony's legacy for us?

At heart, his legacy suggests a series of simple rules which follow from Jesus' message in today's Gospel passage:

- God loves us and wants the best for us. Everything else is secondary.
- We should live our lives for God and we must make ourselves entirely available to Him.
- Our lives of faith will be lived alone and in company.
- Material possessions can be a barrier to faith, so we must be willing to live simply, without those possessions assuming an importance that is greater than our faith.

May the God of love feed our hearts and sustain our souls to the greater service of Him who feeds, loves, and desires us.

Amen.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

All This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.**

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

We pray for God to fill us with his Spirit.

Generous God,

we thank you for the *power* of your Holy Spirit.

We ask that we may be strengthened to serve you better.

Lord, come to bless us.

All and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the *wisdom* of your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to make us wise to understand your will.

Lord, come to bless us.

All and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the *peace* of your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to keep us confident of your love,
wherever you call us.

Lord, come to bless us.

All and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the *healing* of your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to bring reconciliation and wholeness
where there is division, sickness and sorrow.

Lord, come to bless us.

All and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the *gifts* of your Holy Spirit.

We ask you to equip us for the work which you
have given us.

Lord, come to bless us.

All and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the *breath* of your Holy Spirit,
given by the risen Lord.

We ask you to keep the whole Church,
living and departed,
in the joy of eternal life.

Lord, come to bless us.

All and fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the *fruit* of your Holy Spirit.
We ask you to reveal in our lives the love of Jesus.
Lord, come to bless us.

All and fill us with your Spirit.

Generous God,
you sent your Holy Spirit upon your Messiah at the River Jordan,
and upon the disciples in the upper room.
In your mercy fill us with your Spirit.

**All hear our prayer,
and make us one in heart and mind
to serve you with joy for ever.
Amen.**

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

God has made us one in Christ.
He has set his seal upon us and, as a pledge of what is to come,
has given the Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Alleluia.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 Take time to be holy

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

The Spirit of truth lead you into all truth,
give you grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
and strengthen you to proclaim the word and works of God;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
All Amen.

HYMN 4 Take my life and let it be
Take my life and let it be
Take my life and let it be
Take my life and let it be

(traditional version)
(different traditional version)
(rock version)
(different rock version)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ.
Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For he is our great high priest
who has entered once for all
into the heavenly sanctuary,
evermore to pour upon your Church
the grace and comfort of your Holy Spirit.

He is the one who has gone before us,
who calls us to be united in prayer
as were his disciples in the upper room
while they awaited his promised gift,
the life-giving Spirit of Pentecost.

Therefore all creation yearns with eager longing
as angels and archangels sing the endless hymn of praise:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Antony and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

All **Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

All **Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

Merciful God,
who gave such grace to your servant Antony
that he served you with singleness of heart
and loved you above all things:
help us, whose communion with you
has been renewed in this sacrament,
to forsake all that holds us back from following Christ
and to grow into his likeness from glory to glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.